

# OLNEY INTERFACE TIMBER SALE PROJECT INITIAL PROPOSAL TIMBER SALE PROJECT

State of Montana Department of Natural Resources and  
Conservation

March 2008

## Timber Sale Project is in Its Initial Stages of Development

Montana's Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC), Stillwater Unit, is proposing the Olney Interface Timber Sale Project. The project is in the initial stages of development and public involvement for an Environmental Assessment.

This newsletter is to inform you of the project and its goals. The following information is included:

- The project's objectives, opportunities, considerations, and timeline.
- DNRC's philosophies, directives, and mandate for management of State trust lands.
- General information about the project area and maps that show the proposed harvest units and harvest methods (silvicultural prescriptions).

This proposal would harvest 4 to 6 million board feet (MMbf) of timber from 500 to 1,000 acres of State trust lands. The timber would be harvested from portions of Sections 5, 6, 7, 8, 17, and 18 in Township 32 north, Range 23 west,

located near Olney (see map).

This proposal will provide the analysis on several cost-share roads with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), which would provide long-term access that would enable DNRC to manage State trust lands. USFS roads needed for access are:

- 60E (near Good Creek),
- 1209 (near the southeast corner of Stillwater State Forest),
- 2872 and 10351 (near Good Creek Road southeast of Olney),
- 10356 and 10357 (intersect with Ft. Steele Road), and
- 10355 (road leading to the east side of Dog Lake).

This project is part of an ongoing effort to produce revenue for the

State trusts while maintaining a healthy and productive forest into the future. The School of Mines, Public Buildings, School for the Deaf and Blind, State Normal School, and

State Reform School are the trusts that could receive money from this project.

*This project is part of an ongoing effort to produce revenue for the State trusts while maintaining a healthy and productive forest into the future.*

### Inside this issue:

<i>Management Planning of State Trust Lands</i>	2
<i>Did You Know...</i>	3
<i>Project Objectives and Opportunities</i>	4
<i>Project Considerations</i>	5
<i>Roads</i>	8
<i>Other Activities on the Forest</i>	10
<i>What is the Next Step in the Process?</i>	11

### Special points of interest:

#### Maps:

- *Vicinity Map (page 4)*
- *Map of Proposed Units (page 6)*
- *Road Easement Map (page 9)*

*Submit comments to Pete Evans by April 16, 2008*

*To stay involved in this project even if you do not have comments or concerns at this time, submit form on page 11.*

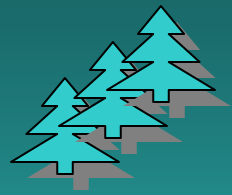
# Management and Planning of State Trust Lands

## DNRC'S Directive

Federal lands were granted to the State when Montana was admitted into the Union. The Enabling Act of 1889 granted Sections 16 and 36 of each township to the State of Montana; or, as in the case of Stillwater State Forest, a block of land in lieu of sections in other areas.

Montana's Constitution requires that these lands, called State trust lands, be managed to

provide revenue to support specific beneficiary institutions, such as public schools, State colleges and universities, and other specific State institutions. The Land Board and the Department are legally required to administer these trust lands to produce the largest measure of reasonable and legitimate long-term return for these beneficiary institutions (*Section 77-1-202, Montana Codes Annotated (MCA)*).



*SFLMP: "...Our understanding is that a diverse forest is a stable forest that will produce the most reliable and highest long-term revenue stream..."*

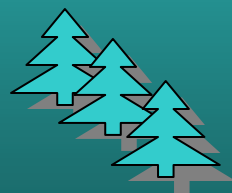
*Revenue from timber sales on State trust lands help support schools such as the West Valley Grade School*



## State Forest Land Management Plan (SFLMP)

On May 30, 1996, the Department released the Record of Decision for the SFLMP. The Land Board approved its implementation on June 17, 1996. In 2003, DNRC adopted the Forest Management Rules (*Administrative Rules of Montana [ARM] 36.11.401 through 450*). The SFLMP outlines the management philosophy, and the proposed project will be implemented according to the Forest Management Rules. The philosophy is:

*"Our premise is that the best way to produce long-term income for the trust is to manage intensively for healthy and biologically diverse forests. Our understanding is that a diverse forest is a stable forest that will produce the most reliable and highest long-term revenue stream... In the foreseeable future, timber management will continue to be our primary source of revenue and our primary tool for achieving biodiversity objectives."*



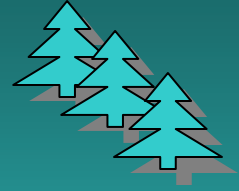
## Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA)

The State and Federal laws that apply to trust lands are, essentially, the same as those that apply to private lands, which include laws pertaining to water and air quality, the Endangered Species Act, etc. The activities related to forest management on State trust lands are also subject to planning and the environmental assessment requirements of MEPA, which include:

- approaching a project using team members with various resource specialties;

- addressing issues and alternate ideas, and, potentially, developing alternatives;
- using environmental data in the planning of the project; and
- providing opportunities for citizens to participate in the discussion of the proposed projects prior to decisions being made.

The goal is to incorporate public involvement and utilize an interdisciplinary approach to facilitate an informed decision.



### Did You Know...

A **board foot** is lumber that measures 12 inches wide by 12 inches long by 1 inch thick.

**Mbf** is an acronym for one thousand board feet; the 'M' relates to the Roman numeral 1,000. A truck load of logs carries about 4.5 Mbf. In the same token, **MMbf** is an acronym for 1,000,000 board feet.

The **fir engraver beetle** is a bark beetle that bores tunnels under the bark of the tree for feeding and egg laying. This tunneling action girdles and finally kills the tree over time.

**Dwarf mistletoe** is a small leafless, parasitic plant that extracts water and nutrients from live conifer trees, such as western larch and Douglas-fir, and causes swelling, witches

brooms, chlorosis (causes the needles to yellow), reduced growth and reproductive capacity, and, possibly, even death.

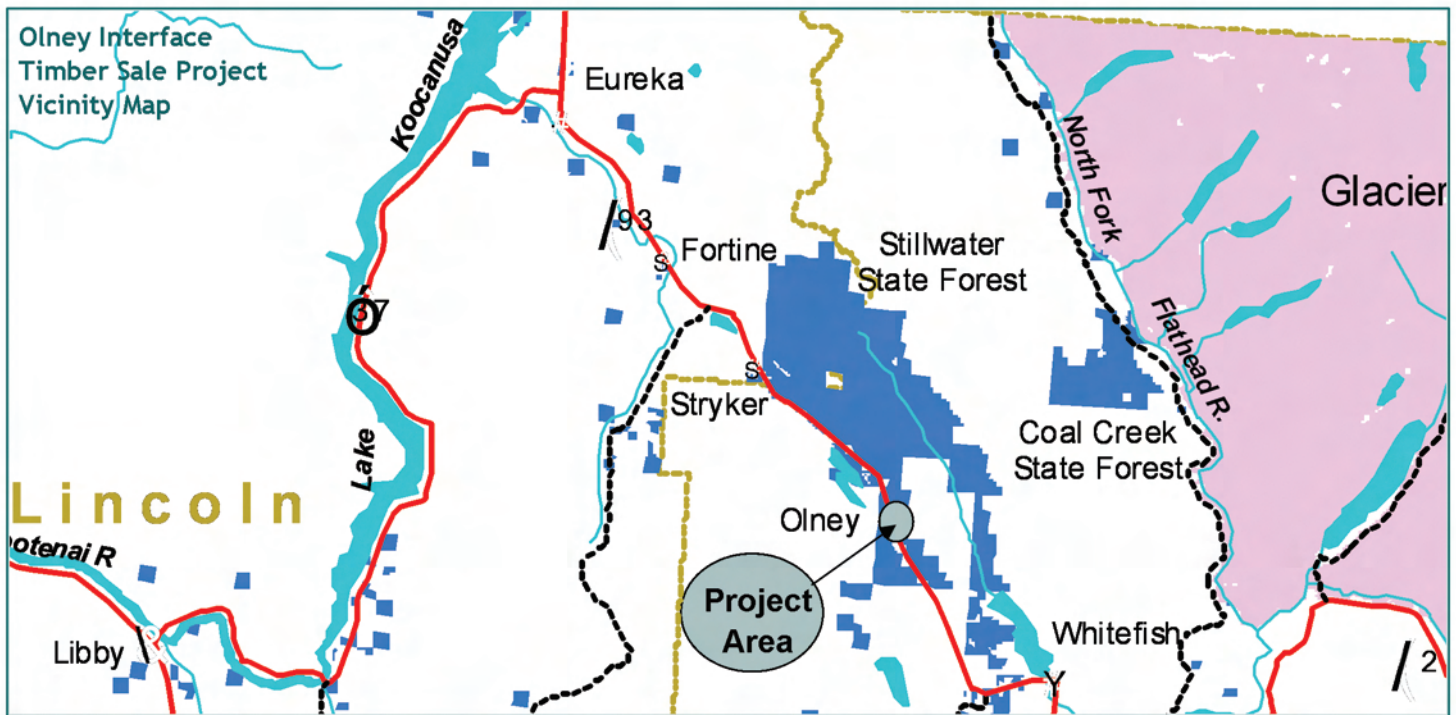
Under the direction of the **State Board of Land Commissioners (Land Board)**, the Department manages timber, mineral, and surface resources on State trust lands for the benefit of the common schools and other endowed institutions in Montana. The Land Board consist of Montana's 5 top elected officials: Governor, Secretary of State, Attorney General, State Auditor and Superintendent of Public Instruction,.

**Snags** are standing dead trees or remaining portions of broken off trees. Snags provide feeding and/or resting sites for wildlife species.

*Providing opportunities for citizens to participate in discussions of proposed projects prior to decisions being made is a requirement of MEPA.*







## Project Objectives and Opportunities

In order to meet the goals of the Department's management philosophy, the Department has set specific project objectives:

- Promote biodiversity by managing for appropriate or desired stand structures and species compositions based on ecological characteristics such as topography, habitat type, disturbance regime, and unique characteristics.
- Reduce the hazard of fuel loading through forest-management activities that will regenerate new stands of healthy trees while improving the vigor and growth of trees remaining in the forest.
- Contribute to the DNRC/ Northwestern Land Office

(NWLO) target of annual timber volume harvested. DNRC is required by State law (77-5-221 through 223, *Montana Codes Annotated [MCA]*) to harvest approximately 53.2 million board feet (MMbf) of timber annually and produce revenue over time.

*The specific objectives of this project are to promote biodiversity, reduce fuel loading, and contribute to the NWLO annual timber-harvest volume.*

The Department would also consider other opportunities that would produce long-term revenue to the State trusts. However, the complete

proposals must show the ability to produce long-term revenue comparable to timber management. *Administrative Rules of Montana (ARM)* 36.11.451 through 36.11.456 address the option of DNRC to accept Timber Conservation License in Lieu of Timber Sale applications and implement the bidding process for the license. A written notice of intent to request this License and the \$100 fee must be delivered to the Stillwater Unit office within 60 days of the date this Initial Proposal was provided. For further information, please contact Stillwater State Forest at 406-881-2371.

## Project Considerations

### Who Will Analyze the Project?

An Interdisciplinary (ID) Team, consisting of wildlife and fisheries biologists, a hydrologist, fire management personnel, and Stillwater Unit foresters will analyze this project.

### What Will Be Analyzed Within the Project Area?

Within and surrounding the project area, the ID Team will evaluate impacts to:

- aesthetics (visual)
- vegetation
- fire hazard
- old-growth stands
- timber-stand health
- hydrology/water quality
- fisheries
- soils
- wildlife
- cultural resources
- economics
- roads/transportation system

Other topics will be added to this list if interests and concerns expressed by the public warrant such additions.

### Why Was The Project Area Chosen at This Time?

This area is at high risk for high-intensity stand-replacement fires and was chosen at this time to reduce fuel hazards. The high risk factor is due to the excessive amounts of ladder and ground fuels. The ladder-fuel risk is caused by standing dead trees and the overcrowding of green trees. The ground-fuel problem

is caused by fallen dead trees. The fir engraver beetles (*Scolytus ventralis*) have attacked grand fir trees and the Douglas-fir bark beetles (*Dendroctonus pseudotsugae*) have attacked Douglas-fir trees; both contribute toward timber stand mortality.

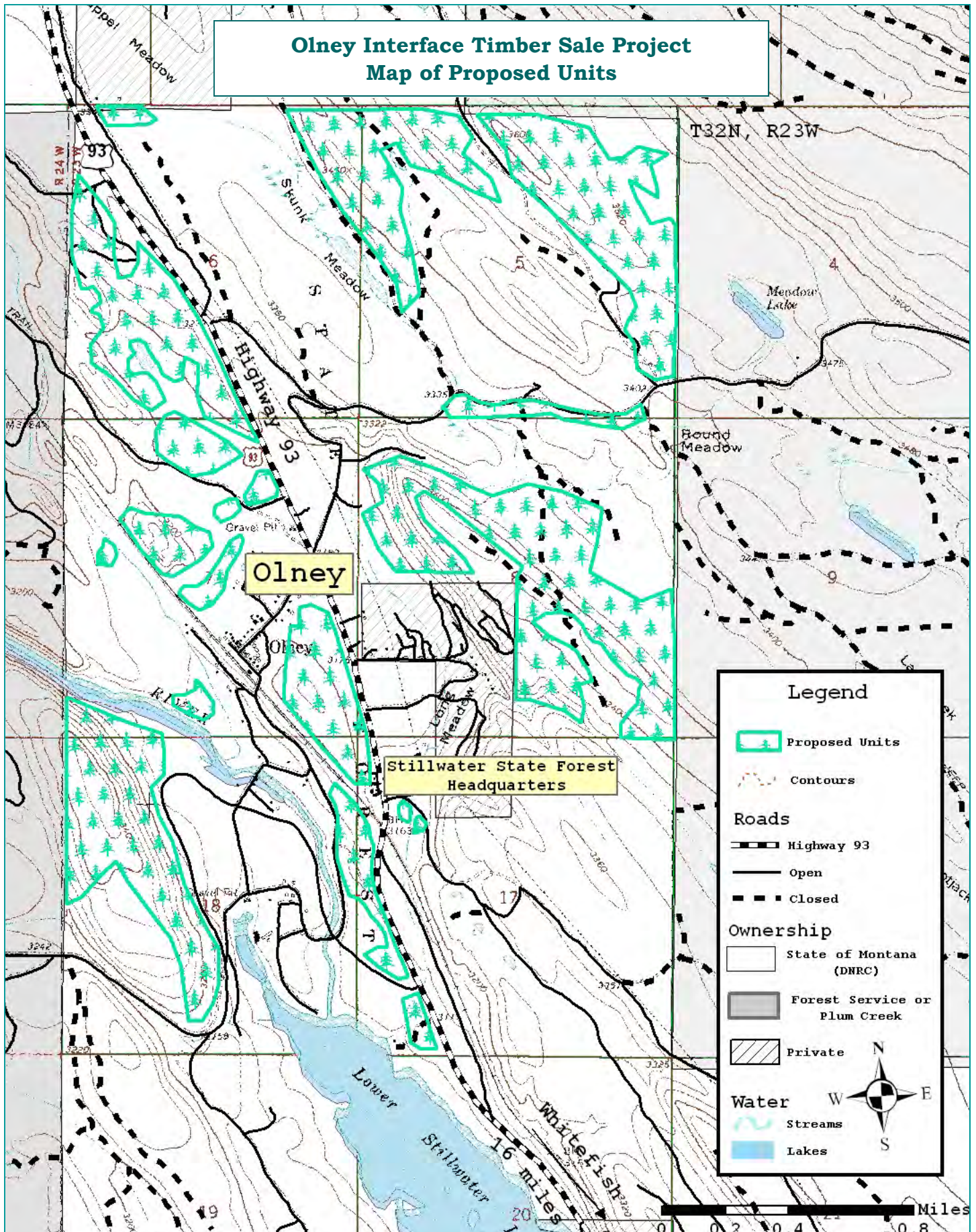


*Standing dead trees and overcrowded green trees contribute to the ladder fuels and the various beetles contribute to the ground fuel problem of fallen dead trees.*





# Olney Interface Timber Sale Project Map of Proposed Units





## How is DNRC Trying to Change These Timber Stands?

Typically, the fire regimes of the Olney Interface proposal area are of mixed severity and the wildfire frequency is variable. DNRC would like to reduce the wildfire risk and, in the event of a wildfire, make fires easier to control.

Increasing defensible space around the Stillwater State Forest headquarters and on State ground near residences in the project area is one goal of this project. Ladder fuels would be reduced and spacing between the crowns of live trees would be increased through improvement cuts. Combined with a higher level of slash treatment (90 percent of the slash created would be reduced), this would reduce

the chance that a ground fire would get into tree tops and spread from crown to crown. A wildfire is much easier to control on the ground than in the tree crowns.

*By treating 90 percent of the slash created from the timber harvest, the chance of a ground fire reaching tree tops and spreading from tree to tree would be greatly reduced.*

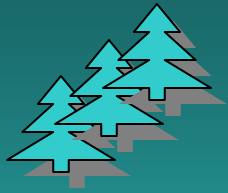
A way to achieve a more natural forest condition is to use a variety of silvicultural treatments across the forest landscape, which creates a mosaic pattern. Thus, a

variety of age classes of trees are created that are less prone to becoming disease infected and insect infested. This mosaic pattern will also reduce the risk of losing whole stands by wildfires while still providing for a variety of wildlife needs.

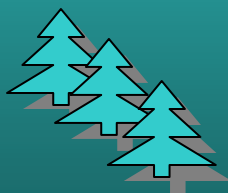
To achieve this mosaic pattern, each stand would be evaluated and a silvicultural prescription would be written that best fits that particular stand of timber. Silvicultural treatments could include shelterwoods, seedtrees with reserves, small clearcuts with reserves, improvement cuts, and intermediate thinnings.



*Portions of the proposed stands would appear similar to this stand following harvesting activities, which should reduce the severity of wildfires..*



*Acquiring and  
granting easement  
through the  
Federal Road Cost-  
Share Program is  
a consideration  
with this project.*



## Roads

### What is the Plan for the Roads in This Area?

The proposed harvest units would be accessed via existing roads and the low-standard temporary roads that would be built with this project. The temporary roads would be closed when harvesting activities have been completed.

All existing roads accessing the proposed harvest areas would be assessed to ensure compliance with Best Management Practices, better known as BMPs.

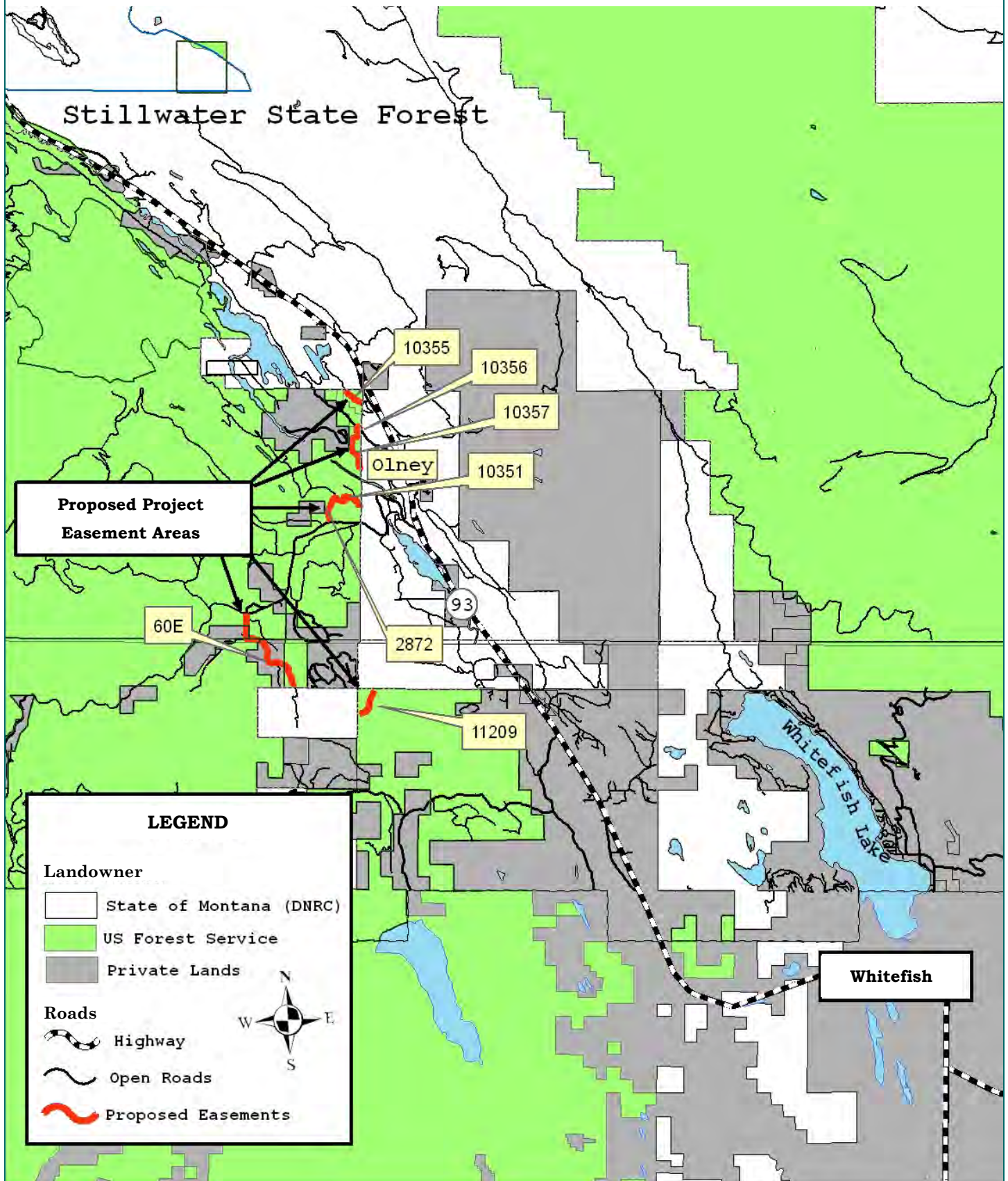
The approach at the Stillwater State Forest headquarters presents safety concerns; therefore, a new approach to Highway 93 from the headquarters is being considered.

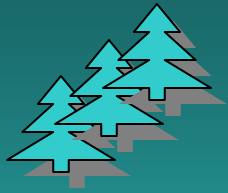
Considerations for this project also include acquiring and granting easements through the Federal Road Cost-Share Program. The *EASEMENT MAP* on the following page shows the routes where easements are being considered.

Roads would be managed as they have in the past to protect wildlife and their habitats and minimize costs for road maintenance. Stillwater State Forest personnel will be evaluating the Upper Whitefish Road to determine how to improve the road. Road improvements would reduce the maintenance needs and costs in the future.

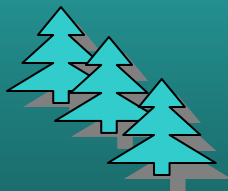


**PROPOSED OLNEY INTERFACE TIMBER SALE PROJECT  
ROAD EASEMENT MAP**





*Activities besides timber sale projects also take place on Stillwater State Forest and include water-quality monitoring and many types of land use licenses and leases.*



## **Other Activities on the Forest**

### **Other Timber Sale Activities in this Vicinity**

- Plum Creek Timber Company, purchaser of the West Fork of Swift Creek Timber Sale near Upper Whitefish Lake, harvested timber until the first part of February, when the snow became a big hindrance to operations. Operations, including log hauling on Upper Whitefish Road, will resume after breakup. The sale is scheduled to be completely harvested by the end of the winter in 2008.
- Plum Creek Timber Company, also purchaser of the Point of Rock Timber Sale, is scheduled to have the sale harvested by the fall of 2009.
- RBM Lumber, purchaser of the Dogwing Timber Sale from the Duck-to-Dog Timber Sale Project, started harvesting timber along the Ewing Road in the late fall of 2007, but will soon close down for spring breakup.
- The Steeledog Timber Sale, also part of the Duck-to-Dog Timber Sale Project, will be out for bid during the spring.

### **Monitoring Water Quality on Stillwater State Forest**

Monitoring water quality, including the Stillwater River drainage, has been an annual practice since 1976. Monitoring has included total suspended sediment, nutrient load (nitrates and phosphates), and stream discharge.

### **Bridge Project**

Repairs to the Swift Creek bridge at 7.25 mile on Upper Whitefish Road will likely be done sometime this summer. A detour may be required while this is in progress.

### **Land Use Licenses/Leases**

The active Land Use Licenses/Leases in the Olney Interface area include several for commercial snowmobiling, snowmobile trail grooming, dog sledding, mill sites, cabinsites, and general recreational permits. All of these generate revenue for the trusts.



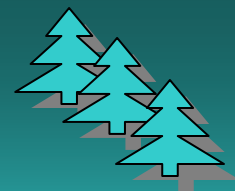
## What is the Next Step in the Process?

### Feedback

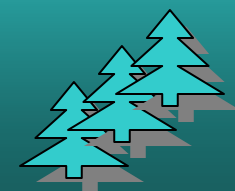
We would like your comments, concerns, and recommendations on the proposal. Please convey your comments to Pete Evans via mail: Stillwater State forest, P.O. Box 164, Olney, MT 59927; phone: 406-881-2676; or e-mail: pevans@mt.gov by April 14, 2008 for consideration in the next phase of this project. If you have no concerns at this time, but would like to stay involved in the process of the project, please complete and send the form at the bottom to the above address.

### Defining and Developing the Alternatives

After compiling and reviewing the input, the ID Team will finish defining and developing alternative ways to achieve the project objectives and begin to assess the effects on the various resources. An environmental analysis will be conducted. Early in 2009, a proposed decision and prepared timber sale contract package will be presented to the Land Board for approval prior to implementing the timber sale.



*Please send your  
comments and  
concerns to Pete Evans  
at Stillwater State  
Forest by April 14,  
2008. Your comments  
will help in developing  
the project.*



## I Would Like to Stay Involved in this Project

**I do not have comments or concerns at this time, but would like to stay involved in the process of project development. Following are my name, address, and telephone number.**

---

---

---

---

**State of Montana  
Department of Natural  
Resources and  
Conservation**

**Stillwater Unit  
P.O. Box 164  
Olney, MT 59927**

**Phone: 406-881-2371  
Fax: 406-881-2372  
E-mail: [pevans@mt.gov](mailto:pevans@mt.gov)**

**PATRICK RENNIE  
DNRC ARCHAEOLOGY  
1625 ELEVENTH AVENUE  
HELENA MT 59620**

